



ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥



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Importance of Hair and Turban to the Sikhs

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The *Kes*, *Kesha*, or hair, is an indispensable main essential of the Sikh faith as enunciated by the Tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh at the time of the institution of the Sikh baptismal ceremony in 1699. It is an integral part of the human body created with it by God and calls for its preservation and maintenance as any other part thereof. It was, and is still, therefore, enjoined upon every Sikh at the time of his baptism to preserve the hair of his head, beard and other parts of his body uncut and unshorn. With the removal of his hair, a Sikh becomes an apostate (ਅਫ਼ੜ) and is excommunicated from the Sikh fold. He is then no longer recognised as a Sikh.

This is borne out by the commands of the Guru recorded in his *Hukamnamas* or letters, in the Rule of Sikh Conduct, the *Rahit-namas*, and in other books on the religion and history of the Sikhs compiled and written by contemporary and later writers from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the present day.

The intact preservation of the *Kes* or hair is further emphasized by putting the shaving of hair under taboo as the first don't or *kurahit* of the Sikh Faith.

These essentials and don'ts (ਰਹਿਤਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਕੁਰਹਿਤਾਂ) are fundamentals of the Sikh Faith and are to be strictly observed as they form an essential part of the Sikh discipline.

The Turban of a Sikh is an inseparable part of his dress to keep his hair in good form and properly covered. The turban also adds to the dignity of the person wearing it.

Since the injunction against the shaving of head, beard, etc., is an article of Sikh Faith and is an established historical fact, it should be enough to quote here the relevant pieces from the writings of the Guru, of his close associates and contemporary disciples, and from works on the religion and history of the Sikhs.

Writing to Sikh congregation on June 25, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and the last Guru of the Sikhs, who initiated the baptismal ceremony among the Sikhs in 1699, said in a letter (Hukam-nama) : "You should take the Sikh baptism of the Sword, Khande da Amrit (ਖੰਡੇ ਦਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ) from the five (Sikhs), keep (preserve uncut and unshaven) hair—this is our insignia (tusan Khande da amrit panjan ton laina Kes rakhne, ih asadi mohar hai—

ਤੁਸਾਂ ਖੰਡੇ ਦਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪੰਜਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਲੈਣਾ, ਕੇਸ ਰੱਖਣੇ, ਇਹ ਅਸਾਡੀ ਮੋਹਰ ਹੈ) ।

The Guru told his close associate and scribe Ram Kaur (baptized under the name of Gurubaksh Singh) : "Hair is the insignia of the Guru. He who discards it is an evil spirit, a ghost condemned of the angel of death" (Mukat Nama—Rahit-Nama, p. 16)

ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਛਾਪ ਸਿਰ ਕੇਸ ਦੀ ਪਾਹੁਲ ਦੇਇ ਉਤਾਰ-ਸੰ ਬੇਮੁਖ ਜਾਨਹੁ ।

ਲੇਟੇ ਕੋ ਬੰਸੁ, ਕੇ ਛਾਪ ਮੁੰਡਾਵਤ, ਜਮਦੁਖ ਭੋਗ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰੰਤ ਪਛਾਨਹੁ ।

ਸਾਕ ਤੱਜੇ ਤਿਹ ਖਾਨ ਤਜੇ ਜੋ ਯਾਲਹਿ ਤਾਸ ਪਾਪੀ ਹੀ ਮਾਨਹੁ ।

ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਿਜੋਗ ਕਹਹਿ ਇਹ ਬੇਮੁਖ ਤਿਆਗ ਕਿਉਂ ਪਾਪ ਨਮਾਨੋਂ ॥31॥

The Rehat-Nama of Preblad Singh, another associate of the Guru, says that (Kes) should be recognised as an essential of the Sikh Faith (Rahitnama, p. 10).

In reply to a question by Nandlal, a contemporary devoted Sikh and author of a number of Sikh treatises, the Guru told him that a Sikh should comb his hair twice a day and wrap his turban properly folded.

(Tankhah-Nama, the Kuliya Bhai Nandlal Goya, p. 180),

ਸੋਰਠਾ

ਕੰਘਾ ਦੋਨਉ ਵਕਤ ਕਰ ਪਾਗ ਚੁਨਹਿ ਕਰ ਬਾਂਧਈ ।

ਸਾਤਨ ਨੀਤ ਕਰੇਇ ਨ ਦੁਖ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਠਾਲ ਜੀ ॥13॥

According to the Sri Guru Sobha (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਸੋਠਾ) of poet Sainapat, who was not only a courtier of Guru Gobind Singh but was also an eye-witness to most of the events of the Guru's life, the Guru issued clear injunctions to his Sikh followers "not to shave their hair and beards under any circumstances, not even when their parents had died" (as was the practice among the Hindus). "He who obeyed this injunction as a part of the Sikh discipline, would alone be a true Sikh—Sikh Sahi—the disobedient ones would be ill-circumstanced in the community. (Vide V, 18-24,30; VI, I, etc)

George Forster, the well-known traveller from East India to England, who passed through the Punjab, the country of the Sikhs, in 1783, wrote from Kashmir to Mr Gregory at Lucknow, on the basis of his personal observations.

"They (the Sikhs) permit the growth of the hair of the head, and beard, they generally wear an iron bracelet on the hand, and the use of tobhacoo is proscribed amongst them." (Early European Accounts of the Sikhs, p. 79).

And Major James Browne tells us in his History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs (1787), that :

“From the time, that he (a Sikh) is admitted into the fraternity, he wears a steel ring round one of his wrists, lets his hair and beard grow to full length and call on the name of the Guru in confirmation of all engagements.” (Introduction, p. xi, Ibid., 18).

We also give below relevant quotations from a few prominent works on the history and religion of the Sikhs, arranged chronologically :

Malcolm, Lt. Col., Sketch of the Sikhs, 1812, p. 148.

“The disciples of (Guru) Gobind (Singh) were required to allow their hair to grow... - ”

Cunningham, J. D., A History of the Sikhs, 1849, pp. 76-8.

“They should have one form of initiation, he said, their locks should remain unshorn, they should all name themselves Singhs.”

Gordon, Sir John J.H., The Sikhs, 1904, pp 40-1.

“In order to mark them as a select body who should be known by outward signs, it was declared that every true Sikh must always have five things with him, their names all commencing with the letter ‘K’—namely, Kes (long hair or the head, The Sikh must never cut his hair or beard) Kangha (comb) to secure the hair tied up in a knot on the top of the head Macauliffe, M.A., The Sikh Religion, 1909, Vol. V, pp. 91-7.

“The Guru invited all his Sikhs to attend the great Baisakhi at Anandpur without shaving or cutting their hair (p. 91).

“... A supplementary ordinance was now issued that if anyone cut his hair, smoked tobacco, associated with a

Muhammadan woman, or ate the flesh of an animal whose throat had been jagged with a knife, he must be re-baptised, pay a fine, and promise not to offend any more; Otherwise he must be held to be excommunicated from the Khalsa". p. 97)

Narang, G.C. The Transformation of Sikhism, 1912, pp. 81-2

"This was the significance of the Pahul or the baptism introduced by (Guru) Gobind (Singh). He made it a rule that all Sikhs should abstain from smoking, and should wear turbans and always keep the following five kakars or five things whose names begin with 'K', viz., Kes or long hair and long beards".

Khazan Singh, History and Philosophy of the Sikh Religion 1914, Part II, p. 544.

"The offences subjecting the offender to an immediate excommunication from brotherhood were (4) tampering with the hair. Such outcastes were held liable to very severe punishments and could be re-admitted only on re-initiation." Payne, C.H., A Short History of the Sikhs, p. 35.

"The spirit of brotherhood was still further emphasized by the introduction of a distinctive dress and the wearing of the five 'K's—namely, the Kes or uncut hair and beard".

Parry, R.E., The Sikhs of the Punjab, 1921, pp. 11-12.

"These are the five outward signs of Sikhism, each beginning with the letter 'K', and known as the five Kakar : 1) Kesh or long hair (2) Kangha".

Scott, G.B., Religion and Short History of the Sikhs, 1930, pp. 28-9.

"Novitiates are exhorted never to cut hair or beard."

Teja Singh; Essays in Sikhism, 1944, pp. 32-3,

“There was to be no caste among them, and all wear the same signs that is, long hair. They were to call themselves Singhs.”

Pincott, Frederic, *The Sikh Religion : A Syn posium.* (Pub. 1958)—Sikhism, p. 80.

“Guru Gobind Singh ordained that every Sikh should always retain about his person five things, each beginning with the letter ‘K’ that is, Kes, hair. A Sikh is to be distinctly different from both Hindu and Muhammadan, both of whom shave the head. A Sikh is never to shave, or even to cut either hair or beard, as long as he lives.”

Ranjit Singh, *The Sikh way of Life*, 1968, p. 102.

“The discipline prescribed by the Guru at the time of administering Amrit (baptism) is briefly as follows :

A Sikh must wear 5 Ks.

(1) Kesh —Unshorn hair like the ancient sages (rishis) as a pledge of dedication to the Guru. Kesh is the first token of Sikh faith. The hair and beard is a part of the personality of the Khalsa.”

In addition to the above evidence from the writings of the Guru himself and of his close associates and devotees speaking with personal knowledge, and of some eminent scholars, there are the writings of a number of historians and theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose works in Punjabi, Persian and Urdu languages tell us a great deal about the importance attached by the Sikhs to the hair of their heads and beards, an essential of their faith. In the first half of the eighteenth century when the Mughal Emperors Bahadur Shah (1707-12) and Farrukh-Siyar (1712-19), followed by Muhammad Shah (1719-48) and Ahmed

Shah (1748-54) had ordered an indiscriminate massacre of the Sikhs wherever found, the Sikhs preferred to lay down their lives than allow their hair to be shaved to save themselves

So hard were the ordeals through which the Sikhs (also known as Singhs or Khalsa after baptism) had to pass through and so great were the sacrifices that they had to make for their faith—to keep their hair intact to the last breath of their lives—that they are still remembered in the daily Sikh prayer which acts as a source of inspiration to them in difficult times. The relevant passage in the Sikh Prayers is as follows :

“Think of those Singhs, men and women, who sacrificed their lives at the alter of dharma (duty enjoined by Sikhism) who were cut up joint by joint (ਬੰਦ ਬੰਦ ਕਟਵਾਏ), who suffered their scalps to be scraped off (ਖੋਪੜੀਆਂ ਲੁਹਾਈਆਂ) who were broken on the wheels (ਚਰਖੜੀਆਂ ਤੇ ਚੜੇ) who were sawn or flayed alive (ਆਰਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਚੀਰੇ ਗਏ, ਪੁਠੀਆਂ ਖੱਲਾ ਲੁਹਾਈਆਂ) and who abjured not their faith and perjured not their soul but lived their devotion to Sikhism with their hair intact to the last breath of their lives think of those great martyres, O Khalsa, and utter Wahiguru, Wahiguru, Wahiguru—Wonderful, Wonderful, Wonderful, is the Lord.”

All this speaks for itself and should be enough to show conclusively that all Sikhs are required at all times to (1) keep their hair and beards intact, and (2) to wear turbans as an inseparable part of their dress to keep their hair in proper form.

As Sikhs are easily recognisable by their bearded faces and head-gear, daster or turban, they also serve them as

helpful deterrents against undesirable acts and behaviour and keep them to the right path. Living among the Hindu and Muslim populations, the Sikhs generally act as neutrals and play the part of reconciling friends when the two happen to all out on religious and other questions. We have a living pexample of this. In the 1946 riots at Calcutta, when the whole atmosphere was poisoned with communal virus, the Sikhs played the part of neutrals by helping the sufferers of qotb sides and bringing about peace and harmony among the blood-thirsty opponents. This was greatly appreciated not only by the people of India but also of the world at large. And historically it stands to the eternal credit to the Sikhs.

The other Sikh essentials in addition to Kes and Kangha or comb, are Kachh—a pair of shorts, Kara—an iron bracelet and Kirpan—a sword.

The Kangha speaks for itself. It is to keep the hair well-combed and clean.

The Kachh reminds a Sikh of his vow to maintain the high standard of sexual morality as ordained by Sikh rule of conduct. It is also an all-time active dress as compared to dhoti and shalwar.

Similarly a Sikh's Kara warns him against un-Sikh like acts and encourages him to be helpful to the deserving needy. Worn on the right hand, as it is, it also provides protection to it when wielding a weapon in fighting.

The Kirpan of the Sikhs is a weapon of defence against the evildoers as a last resort. Guru Gobind Singh justified its use as such in his Zafarnamah to emperor Aurangzeb saying :

Chu kar az hamah heelte car-guzasht,
halal ast burden ba-shamshir dast,
that is :

When all other means have failed to achieve an object,

It is lawful to take the sword in hand.

These five essential symbols together are called the Panj
Kakar, or the Five 'K's.

PATIALA,
July 26, 1982.

GANDA SINGH

ਡਾ. ਗੰਡਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਯਾਦਗਾਰੀ ਟਰੱਸਟ ਪਟਿਆਲਾ ।

ਸਾਲ 1990 ਵਿਚ ਡਾ. ਗੰਡਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਯਾਦਗਾਰੀ ਟਰੱਸਟ, ਪਟਿਆਲਾ ਵੱਲੋਂ
 ਡਾ. ਯਾਦਗਾਰੀ ਯੋਗ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਯੋਗੀ ਦਾ ਨਵੀਂ ਸਾਲ ਲਈ ਆਨੁਸਾਰ ਹੋ ।

1. ਪ੍ਰਭਾ ਪੁਰਸਕਾਰ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਵਿਚ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਦਾ
 ਡਾ. ਉੱਚਿਦਰਜੀਤ ਕੌਰ ਸਥਾਨ ਤੇ ਯੋਗਦਾਨ ।
2. ਦੂਜਾ ਪੁਰਸਕਾਰ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਵਿਚ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਦਾ
 ਬੀਬੀ ਸਿਮਰਨ ਕੌਰ ਸਥਾਨ ਤੇ ਯੋਗਦਾਨ ।
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 - (ੳ) ਸੁਰਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਪ੍ਰੰਪਰਾ ।
 ਭਾਣੀਆ
 - (ਅ) ਬੀਬੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਪਾਲ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਪ੍ਰੰਪਰਾ ।
 ਕੌਰ
 - (ੲ) ਕੈਪਟਨ ਨਸੀਬ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਢਲੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ।
 ਸਿੰਘ
 - (ਸ) ਸ. ਅਮਰਜੀਤ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਵਿਚ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਦਾ
 ਸਿੰਘ ਸਥਾਨ ਤੇ ਯੋਗਦਾਨ ।
 - (ਹ) ਡਾ. ਸਮਜੋਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ : Nam as a Dynamic
 Force.

ਇਹ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਵੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਹਰ ਇਕ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਯੋਗੀ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਯੋਗੀਤਾ
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Dr. Ganda Singh Memorial Trust, Patiala.

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- iii) ਭਾਈ ਮਨੀ ਸਿੰਘ ।
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